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Laos

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Press Item for the DCI

WASHINGTON--SEN. CHARLES MATHIAS, R-MD., ACCUSED THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH TODAY OF SUBVERTING THE WILL OF CONGRESS BY USING EX-GREEN BERET TROOPS IN CIVILIAN CLOTHING TO HELP DEFEND THE GOVERNMENT OF LAOS.

MATHIAS, JOINED BY SENATE DEMOCRATIC LEADER MIKE MANSFIELD, MONT., WARNED THAT THE WAR IN LAOS WAS GROWING TO DANGEROUS PROPORTIONS. MANSFIELD CALLED FOR A RECONVENING OF PARTIES TO THE 1962 GENEVA ACCORDS TO STRAIGHTEN OUT THE SITUATION.

IF THE WAR CONTINUES TO ESCALATE, MANSFIELD WARNED, "ALL THE PLANS FOR VIETNAMIZATION AND EVERYTHING ELSE WILL GO DOWN THE DRAIN."

MATHIAS CHARGED THAT U.S. MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN LAOS "CLEARLY VIOLATE" THE SPIRIT OF THE NATIONAL COMMITMENTS RESOLUTION PASSED BY THE SENATE LAST YEAR, AS WELL AS LEGISLATION PROHIBITING THE USE OF FUNDS FOR AMERICAN COMBAT TROOPS IN LAOS OR THAILAND.

HE CITED NEWS REPORTS INDICATING "THE PRESENCE OF HUNDREDS OF EX-GREEN BERETS, DESCRIBED AS HAVING JOINED THE CIA (CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY) IN LAOS BECAUSE THEY WERE FED UP WITH HAVING THEIR HANDS TIED IN VIETNAM."

MATHIAS SAID "DUBIOUS DISGUISES" WERE BEING USED IN LAOS AND "EACH ONE SUBVERTS THE CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS OF THE CONGRESS."

HE SAID MILITARY ADVISERS WERE REPORTED TO BE "SWARMING OVER THE COUNTRY" AND SAID THE BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAM HAS NOW EVIDENTLY BEEN SHIFTED TO LAOS IN LEVELS OF INTENSITY HIGHER THAN WORLD WAR II.

"CAN THE RESERVATION OF WAR POWERS TO THE CONGRESS BE CIRCUMVENTED BY REDESIGNATING SOLDIERS AS AGENTS OF THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY OR AS MILITARY ADVISERS?" HE ASKED. "CAN SUCH MILITARY ACTIONS BY THE CIA BE ACCORDED THE CLANDESTINE STATUS OF AUTHENTIC INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS?"

"LAOS," MATHIAS DECLARED, "HAS BECOME AN ARENA FOR THE REPETITION OF THE MISTAKES OF OUR VIETNAMESE INVOLVEMENT." AND HE SAID THE COMMUNIST CAPTURE OF THE STRATEGIC PLAIN OF JARS AREA WAS EVIDENCE THAT AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN LAOS WILL NOT WORK.

MANSFIELD AGREED THAT THE SITUATION COULD LEAD TO A "VERY DANGEROUS" ESCALATION OF THE CONFLICT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA BUT QUESTIONED WHETHER A WITHDRAWAL OF AMERICAN FORCES FROM LAOS NOW WOULD "PLACE LAOS AT THE MERCY OF OUTSIDE FORCES."

HE SUGGESTED, AS AN ALTERNATIVE, THAT THE CO-CHAIRMEN OF THE 1962 GENEVA CONVENTION, WHICH PRODUCED THE "NEUTRALIZATION" OF LAOS, MEET AGAIN TO SETTLE THE SITUATION.

OTHERWISE, HE SAID, "IT MAY WELL BE WE ARE IN FOR A MORE DIFFICULT PERIOD."

MANSFIELD ALSO CALLED FOR SPEEDIER WITHDRAWAL OF AMERICAN TROOPS FROM VIETNAM, NOTING THAT 350,194 AMERICANS HAVE BEEN KILLED OR WOUNDED "IN AN AREA IN WHICH WE HAVE NO BUSINESS, IN A WAR IN WHICH WE SHOULD NOT BE ENGAGED AND IN A CONFLICT THAT HAS BEEN A CONTINUING TRAGEDY TO THIS COUNTRY." WPT-6

Comment: Goodwin and Maury have copies.

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